

**Opening Statement Before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and Committee on Oversight**

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Good morning. My name is George Kent, and I am Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. I have served proudly as a non-partisan career Foreign Service officer for more than 27 years, under five Presidents, three Republicans and two Democrats.

As you know, I am appearing here in response to a congressional subpoena. If I did not appear, I would be exposed to being held in contempt. At the same time, I have been instructed by my employer, the United States Department of State, not to appear. I do not know the Department of State's views on disregarding that order, even though section 105(c) of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 U.S.C § 3905, expressly states: "This section shall not be construed as authorizing the withholding of information from the Congress or the taking of any action against a member of the Service who discloses information to the Congress."

I have always been willing to provide facts of which I am aware that are relevant to any appropriate investigation by either Congress or my employer. Yet this is where I find myself today—faced with the enormous professional and personal cost and expense of dealing with a conflict, between the executive and legislative branches, not of my making.

That said, I appear today in the same spirit I have brought to my entire career — as a foreign service officer and State Department employee who has sworn to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, as one of thousands of non-political, career professionals in the foreign service who embody that vow daily, around the world, often in harsh and dangerous conditions.

There has been a George Kent sworn to service in defense of the Constitution and U.S. national interests for nearly 60 consecutive years and counting, ever since my father was sworn in as a midshipman at Annapolis in June 1961, commissioned in 1965 after finishing first in his class, and serving honorably for 30 years, including as Captain of a ballistic missile nuclear submarine. Principled service to country and community remains an honorable professional choice, not just a family tradition dating back to before World War II, one that survived the Bataan Death March and a three year stint in a Japanese POW camp unbroken. I hope the drama

now playing out does not discourage my college-aged son, from seriously considering a life of service.

After two internships on the State Department's Soviet desk in the late 1980s, I formally joined the Foreign Service in 1992, and have not for a moment regretted that choice to devote my life to principled public service. I have served twice in Ukraine, for a total of six years posted in Kyiv: first, during and after the Orange Revolution, from 2004-07, and again from 2015-18, in the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity, when I worked as Deputy Chief of Mission.

In between, I worked in Washington from 2012-15 in several policy and programming positions directly affecting our strategic interests in Ukraine, most notably as Director for Law Enforcement and Justice Sector programming for Europe and Asia, and as the European Bureau's Senior Anti-Corruption Coordinator.

In the summer of 2018, then-Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell asked me to come back from Kyiv to Washington early to join his team as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State to take charge of our Eastern Europe and Caucasus portfolio, covering six countries on the front line of Russian aggression and malign influence: Ukraine; Moldova; Belarus; Georgia; Armenia; and Azerbaijan.

The Administration's National Security Strategy, which Wess helped write, makes clear the strategic challenge before us: great power competition with peer or near peer rivals such as Russia and China, and the need to compete for positive influence, without taking countries for granted.

In that sense, Ukraine has been on the front lines, not just of Russia's war in eastern Ukraine since 2014, but of the greater geopolitical challenges facing the United States. Ukraine's success thus is very much in our national interest, in the way we have defined our national interests broadly in Europe for the past 75 years, and specifically in central and Eastern Europe for the 30 years since the fall of the Wall in 1989. A Europe whole, free, and at peace, our strategic aim for the entirety of my Foreign Service career, is not possible without a Ukraine whole, free, and at peace, including Crimea and Donbas, currently occupied by Russia.

I am grateful for all of you on the key Congressional committees who have traveled to Ukraine the past five years, and appropriated billions of dollars in assistance in support of our primary strategic goals, in particular: increasing Ukraine's resiliency in the face of Russian aggression in the defense, energy, cyber, and information spheres; and empowering institutions and civil society to tackle corruption and undertake systemic reforms.

I believe all of us — in the legislative and executive branches, the interagency community working out of our embassy in Kyiv, with Ukrainians in government and civil society, and with Transatlantic allies and partners — can be proud of our efforts and our resolve in Ukraine over the past five years, even though much remains to be done.

U.S. officials who have spoken publicly in Ukraine to push back against Russian aggression and corrupt influences have been subjected to defamatory disinformation campaigns, and even online threats, for years - starting in 2015 for former Ambassador Pyatt, in 2017 for me, and in 2018 for former Ambassador Yovanovitch.

That was, frankly, to be expected from Russian proxies and corrupt Ukrainians, an indicator that our efforts were hitting their marks. You don't step into the public arena of international diplomacy in active pursuit of principled U.S. interests against venal vested interests without expecting vigorous pushback.

On the other hand, I fully share the concerns in Ambassador Yovanovitch's statement on Friday expressing her incredulity that the U.S. Government chose to remove an Ambassador based, as best she could tell, on unfounded and false claims by people with clearly questionable motives at an especially challenging time in bilateral relations with a newly elected Ukrainian President.

One final note: I will do my best to answer your questions today. I suspect your questions may well involve some issues, conversations, and documents that span a number of years. The State Department is in the process of collecting documents in response to the subpoena that may contain facts relevant to my testimony. I have no such documents or materials with me today. With the exception of a few documents related to the State Department Inspector General submission to Congress this month, neither the Department nor the committee have provided documents at issue in this inquiry. I will thus do my best to answer as accurately, completely, and truthfully as I can, to the best of my recollection.

And with those introductory words, I am ready to answer all of your questions regarding the subject of the subpoena which has ordered me to appear before you today.